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Every law has both a literal sense—the letter of the law—and a spirit—the living principle it upholds and honors.

The Pharisees lived by the letter of the Law, even adding many burdensome details, but paid little attention to the spirit of the Law. For example, God intended that tithing would acknowledge His ownership of all things. The Pharisees carefully tithed even mint and anise, but withheld from Him the thing He most desired—the heart (Luke 11:42). The Pharisees followed a detailed regimen of washing before eating but were not concerned about their unclean hearts.

Such divorcing of letter and spirit is called legalism. Legalism is deadly, for it allows the superficial rule keeper to believe that he is obeying God when he is actually evading the intention and will of God.

Please note that careful obedience to the Word of God is not legalism. This is commanded (John 14:15). Making applications to Bible principles is not legalism. This is expected of every mature Christian (Hebrews 5:14). An agreed-upon church discipline is not legalism. This is assumed (Acts 16:4; Hebrews 13:17).

Unfortunately, legalism did not die with the Pharisees. It may appear today even in the practice of Scriptural ordinances. If we live by the letter rather than the spirit, sisters will wear the veil of submission but be stubborn and willful. We may give kisses of charity while harboring resentment and bitterness. Such actions, which comply with the letter of Scripture but evade the spirit of Scripture, indicate legalism.

The Mennonite Church has benefited much from a statement of standards to unify her members in applying Bible principles. But if we simply live by the letter, our compliance will be grudging and most likely inconsistent.

Let us look at some examples:

"The more expensive cars, cars with contrasting colors, sports cars as well as sports features on regular cars and all striped tires, shall be avoided"

If we live by the letter, we will avoid sports cars and luxury cars. But if cars are important to our egos, we might look for a model with high horsepower or heated, leather seats. We may change the muffler for the right sound, change the headlights to a catchy color, or add extra lights, window tinting, and other knickknacks. When our spirits harmonize with the mod-

esty, humility, and separation the standard promotes, we will choose a simple, economical car. To us, a car will be a way to provide transportation and serve the Lord rather than a way to raise our status, attract attention to ourselves, or gratify our lusts.

"For the brethren: the regulation coat, plain hat and black footwear. Other clothing or footwear shall not be of fashionable, sporty, or Western styles, and should be consistent with the separated way of life."

If we live by the letter, we will wear a plain suit for church services during cold weather. But we will likely put it on as late as possible in the fall and take it off as soon as possible in the spring. To appear less rigid, we may let it unbuttoned; and to be less conspicuous in society, we will take it off if we stop at a store after prayer meeting. And for social events such as traveling and shopping, we will likely prefer blue jeans (which sociologists recognize as the garment that best hides identity). We will likely avoid wearing the plain hat, which identifies us with Plain People, though we may not object to a cap that identifies us as a promoter of the local machinery dealer.

"For the sisters: A modest plain cape dress without trimming shall be worn in all areas of public life. The dress shall have at least a midcalf-length skirt and three-quarter-length or longer sleeves. Materials shall not be transparent and shall be of subdued modest colors. "

Sisters who live by the letter will wear a cape dress. But if they desire to attract attention and win admiration, they may nullify the modesty of the cape by wearing a buttoned or zippered form-revealing sweater. Trimmings not allowed on dresses may show up on sweaters. The dress may be of a modest pattern, but made of attention-getting colors or prints, or costly fabrics. Sisters may honor the standard by making three-quarter-length sleeves, but dishonor the spirit of the standard by wearing their sleeves pushed up in public places.

If we live by the spirit, we will appreciate the modesty, separation, and identification that the dress standards are intended to promote. And if our spirits are in harmony with the spirit of the standard, we will find compliance easy and joyous.

Do we get the picture? When simplicity, separation, and modesty are in our hearts, our spirits harmonize with the spirit of the Discipline and we willingly obey. But when our spirits are worldly and proud, we will be frustrated to keep just the letter of the *Discipline*. And we will frequently find our spiritual brethren uncomfortable with our practice.

Are you living by the letter or by the spirit? The importance of this ques-

tion is underscored by the words of Jesus, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). — *Brother Melvin*



"Unto Them That Look for Him"

"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Life is full of anticipation. The two-year-old can barely wait for his elephant birthday cake. Soon he is eagerly awaiting his maiden voyage aboard the school van. At fifteen he looks forward to getting his license. Fewer dates in one's lifetime are more anticipated than the day of one's wedding. We anticipate events that are important to us. When was the last time we stood gazing up into the heavens, anticipating the return of Jesus?

The Thessalonian church anticipated Christ's return. In fact, His return was so sure and imminent that occupational pursuits were apparently deemed as unnecessary. Paul in his second letter to them helped them understand Christ's teaching to "occupy till I come." Today, however, we tend to be quite occupied with "occupying" and not as conscious of His coming as we should be. "Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Hebrews 9:28). Christ, in His first coming, being sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." But His second coming will be with great glory as He comes to culminate His work of salvation. How should our anticipation of this affect our daily lives?

"Look[ing] for him" will affect our walk with God. The level of our anticipation is clearly mirrored in the level of diligence we put into our personal relationship with the Lord. Is Christ's return often among our first waking thoughts? If so, we will reach soon for our Bible. Lethargy in devotional life dulls eagerness and eventually our readiness for His return. We need to fill our lamps daily with oil from God's Word as we await the coming of the Bridegroom.

Anticipating Christ's return also strengthens our resistance to temptation. If we anticipate Christ breaking through the clouds, we will turn away

from the shameless billboard or jogger we are passing. Those who truly watch for Him will keep their garments (Revelation 16:15). On the other hand, an attitude of indifference toward Christ's return often results in self-indulgence. "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of" (Matthew 24:48-50).

Our expectation of Jesus' return will also affect our perspective of the degenerating world events. We should not respond in fear and anxiety, but rather see them as evidence that He is coming soon (Luke 21:5-36).

"Look[ing] for him" will affect our walk with others. Our burden for the souls of others should increase as we "see the day approaching." How often do others hear us talk about the Lord's return? Is the subject familiar or foreign to our children? Are our customers well acquainted with the term "Lord willing"? Those to whom we relate on a day-to-day basis should sense that our priorities revolve around being ready to meet our Maker. After all, we think and talk about the subjects we consider important.

Our daily business is important, and the Lord does expect us to be diligent stewards of what He has given us. We do not need to be ashamed that our hands are work worn. But as we work, do we see the mission fields all around us? Do we think about what the Lord's return will mean for our unsaved client or friend (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10)? We must never be too busy swinging the scythe that we do not have time to sow the seed. The sheaves of earthly wealth will stay here and burn. But the sheaves of family, friends, and acquaintances we will take with us (2 Peter 3:11).

Our relationships with our brethren will also benefit by our "look[ing] for him." "But [exhort] one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). As we recognize the brevity of time and the imminence of Christ's return, we should exhort one another to diligence and faithfulness.

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14). Ultimately, our lives reveal whether we are truly looking for Him. We must heed His voice through the Word, through our conscience, and through our brethren. We must keep our garments pure. And we must warn others to "flee from the wrath to come." Does our life express our longing and readiness for His return? It may be today!

Brother Jordan

"Speaking Lies in Hypocrisy"

This warning is one of many to all believers of the perilous times ("latter times") when "some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [that are propagated by men]; speaking lies in hypocrisy" (1 Timothy 4:1-2). The Bible has been used by many groups including the Munsterites, the Nazis, and the Branch Davidians to disseminate their own doctrine at the expense of the gullible. However (coming closer home), "of [our] own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30).

Some knowingly deceive and "subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake." Others may be deceived themselves because they "received not the love of the truth" and are being sent "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" and go on to "speak great swelling words of vanity." They are of the same character as the Old Testament false prophets who came in among the people with "damnable heresies" (2 Peter 2:1).

Christ Himself warned of false prophets who "shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24). How can we know what is true and false and how can we avoid being led astray by men speaking lies? The New Testament is full of verses that help us know the answer.

We must love and follow the truth. To avoid making shipwreck of our faith, we need to "[hold] faith, and a good conscience" (1 Timothy 1:19). The heart of the skeptic is fertile soil for superstition. To accept the teachings of those with charisma or to mistake sincerity for truth is easy. But to heap to ourselves teachers because we have "itching ears" is a specific sign of being unable to endure sound doctrine. While sincerity is a virtue that the faithful covet, being sincere is not synonymous with knowing and living the truth. The sincerity of Saul in persecuting the church helped make him a "chief" of sinners, whom Jesus came into the world to save (1 Timothy 1:15).

Unless we agree with God that we are what He says we are (sinners by nature), and that we need most what He says we need (salvation through grace), and that we are now to live how He says we should live (in humility and holiness), we are ripe for seduction. Any other gospel "is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:7). "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Sa-

tan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Signs and miracles—real or imagined—seem more often to be marks of false doctrine rather than marks of the true (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).

We must understand cross bearing. Cross bearing is found in taking Christ's yoke of meekness and lowliness (Matthew 11:29), learning of Him to die to our own desires, living to serve others, and submitting one to another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:3). Nearly always, those speaking lies in hypocrisy fail to heed the command to "be of the same mind one toward another" and to "be not wise in [their] own conceits" (Romans 12:16); neither do they "walk by the same rule" or "mind the same thing." "They are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ... whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Philippians 3:16-19).

We must "try the spirits." "Many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Our text verse calls them "seducing spirits." They operate in the hearts of men and can often be detected by their teaching and finally by their practice. In 1 John 4:1-8, at least four tests are put to a teacher and his doctrine, including these: (1) Are they "one" with the world or have they overcome the world (verses 4, 5)? (2) Do they "hear" those over them in the Lord (verse 6)?

Paul also warned the Corinthians to avoid the teachers who profess spirituality and overemphasize doctrines such as speaking in tongues. He writes, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:37). We must think right about God-ordained authority, since "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" so that "all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:32, 40). It is our duty to "quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying's. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). The earmarks of earthly wisdom contrast with the earmarks of that which is from above (James 3:13-18).

We must know who we are following. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, who were shaken in mind and troubled by the spirit and word of men speaking lies, beseeching them to "know them" that were over them in the Lord, and to "esteem them very highly," and to "be at peace." Furthermore we are to give to elders "double honour" (1 Timothy 5:17). We are to remember them, follow their faith, consider the end of their conversation, obey them, and submit (Hebrews 13:7, 17). A group that allows women to

play a major part in administrative issues is prone to deception (2 Timothy 3:6; 1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:12).

Jesus portrayed those who speak lies as wolves in "sheep's clothing," but He also gave us an easy way to test them: "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). What is finally the outworking of the teachers to whom we are listening? What does time reveal about their doctrine? The crop will bear testimony to the seeding method. And, of course, do their teachings ring clear with "all scripture"? Presumption, self-will, and speaking evil of dignities are hallmarks of the Balaams and Cores of our day (2 Peter 2:10; Jude 4, 8-13, 16).

We must be careful of change. Those who eagerly dispose of their former practice and even their name embark on a sea of change with foggy horizons and rocky shores. We are to mark and avoid "fair speeches" that cause divisions (Romans 16:17, 18), for such are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). Rather, we must "hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13) and "meddle not with them that are given to change: for their calamity shall rise suddenly" (Proverbs 24:21-22). "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, . . . keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 1:20-21). "[They] make a man an offender for a word, and fay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought" (Isaiah 29.21).

Brother Richard



The Abundant Life (Part 1)

Spiritual Vibrancy

While passing out tracts in Seattle, we met a gentleman who appeared to be spiritually enthusiastic. At the end of our discussion, he asked if he could pray for us. As he prayed he became progressively louder and more excited. At the close he gasped in self-admiration, "I never prayed like that before." Well-worded testimonies and colorful prayers can give an illusion of spirituality. But are words and even works proof that a person is spiritual or even vibrant?

What does it mean to be spiritual? Before Jesus returned to heaven, He promised that the Holy Spirit would come and dwell with us. The Holy

Spirit bears witness of Jesus and glorifies Him within us. The Holy Spirit transforms and helps us to grow in Christlike character. This does not mean that the battle is over or easy. "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13). Take courage! We have help. Also, He equips us for Christian service in the world. Being spiritual is being influenced and led by the Spirit of God. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

How do we gauge vibrancy? Each individual that is led, owned, and empowered by the Spirit will bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). It is not called the fruit of the Christian but the fruit of the Spirit. The miraculous work of the Spirit brings forth His quiet fruit in an abundant life. "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). What flows from us discloses what we really are.

How can we be more vibrant spiritually? Rather than trying to act spiritual in our own way and strength, let us humbly seek God's help in molding our lives. Everything the Spirit reveals that is not godly should be replaced by a Christlike quality. We should submit to His will in circumstances that we face and decisions that we need to make. As we meet God in praise and worship, a deep longing to be close to our heavenly Father will be cultivated and satisfied. Our connection to God is strengthened in collective worship and also by communication throughout the daily duties of life.

The Spirit persistently nudges the Christian at any stage upward and away from himself and the earthly things that drag him down. Praise be to God, the tender, sensitive Holy Spirit quietly awaits to mold his dispositions, attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

Be receptive to the gentle upward tug on your heart. Choose not only the acceptable, but also the more excellent way, in the choices that you face. In Him alone lies the secret of the abundant life!

Brother Joel





PRAYER POINT

*“The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much”*

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed:
For I am thy God” – Isaiah 40:1
Pray that for the year 2014 we would heed
these two not’s and claim the two I am’s.

Pray that the witness going forth on the foreign fields
might bear much ” fruit unto life eternal.”

Thank God for our Christian day schools and
for the teachers as they teach the Bible along with other subjects.

Pray for the salvation of those
Who have departed from the truth.

Thank God for His blessings and mercies
To us throughout the past year.

